



CITY OF OKEECHOBEE, FLORIDA
APRIL 7, 2026, REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING
OFFICIAL MINUTES

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Watford called the regular meeting of the City Council for the City of Okeechobee to order on April 7, 2026, at 6:00 P.M. in the City Council Chambers, located at 55 Southeast (SE) 3rd Avenue (AVE), Room 200, Okeechobee, Florida (FL). The invocation was offered by Pastor Matthew Bowen of Christ Fellowship Church; followed by the Pledge of Allegiance led by Vice Mayor Clark.

II. ATTENDANCE

City Clerk Lane Gamiotea called the roll. Members physically present to establish a quorum: Mayor Dowling R. Watford, Jr., Vice Mayor Monica M. Clark, Council Members Noel A. Chandler, Robert "Bob" Jarriel, and David R. McAuley.

III. AGENDA AND PUBLIC COMMENTS

A. Mayor Watford announced the following modification to the revised published agenda: defer Presentations and Proclamations item IV.C. to a future meeting.

B. Motion by Council Member Jarriel, seconded by Vice Mayor Clark to adopt the revised agenda as amended.

Motion Carried Unanimously.

C. No comment cards were received for public participation for issues not on the agenda.

IV. PRESENTATIONS

A. Mayor Watford and Police Chief Donald Hagan recognized Sergeant Mark Roberts for his five years of service and presented him with a pen, engraved with his name, and a framed Longevity Service Certificate, read into the record as follows: "**Longevity Service Certificate presented to Mark Roberts in recognition of your five years of service, hard work, and dedication to the City, its citizens, and your fellow employees from July 30, 2020, through July 30, 2025.**" [A copy of the certificate has been added to the official Minute File, labeled **Exhibit 7**].

B. Mayor Watford and Chief Hagan recognized Officer Adam Crum for 20 years of total service to date. He was presented with a monetary award of \$1714.67, [three percent of his current annual salary], and a framed Longevity Service Certificate, read into the record as follows: "**In Recognition of your 20 Years of service, hard work, and dedication to the City, its citizens, and your fellow employees from June 11, 2003, through August 2, 2021, [in the Fire Department until it was dissolved] and December 29, 2023, through December 29, 2025.**" [A copy of the certificate was incorporated into the Minute file, labeled **Exhibit 8**].

C. **ITEM DEFERRED:** Recognition of new Officers Gabriel Bowen and Reed Mattson.

V. CONSENT AGENDA

Motion by Council Member McAuley, seconded by Council Member Jarriel to:

A. Dispense with the reading and approve the March 17, 2026, Minutes [as presented in **Exhibit 1**];

B. Approve the February 2026 Warrant Register [in the amounts of General Fund, \$704,945.93; Public Facilities Improvement Fund, \$146,606.16; Capital Improvement Projects Fund, \$11,029.09; and Appropriations Grant Fund, \$7,352.94; as presented in **Exhibit 2**]; and

C. Re-appoint Mr. Carl "Butch" Berlin and Mrs. Karyne Brass as Regular Members and appoint Mrs. Patty Burnette as Alternate Member 1 of 2, replacing Mrs. Jackie Dunnam, to the Planning Board, the Board of Adjustment, and the Design Review Board, terms being May 1, 2026, through April 30, 2029 [as presented in **Exhibit 3**].

Motion Carried Unanimously.

VI. MAYOR WATFORD OPENED THE PUBLIC HEARING FOR ORDINANCE ADOPTION AT 6:12 P.M.

A. Motion by Council Member Jarriel, seconded by Council Member Chandler to read by title only, proposed Ordinance No. 1327, amending the Elections Chapter 26 of the Code of Ordinances by removing the Office of the City Clerk as an elected position, repealing Sections superseded by the 2022 Charter or Interlocal Agreement with the Supervisor of Elections, amending the time period for Noticing City Elections, and clarifying certain procedures [as presented in **Exhibit 4**].

Motion Carried Unanimously.

VI. PUBLIC HEARING CONTINUED

A. Continued. Assistant City Attorney Stephen Conteaguero read into the record the title of Ordinance No. 1327 as follows: **“AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY OF OKEECHOBEE, FL; AMENDING THE CODE OF ORDINANCES CHAPTER 26-ELECTIONS, BY REMOVING THE ELECTED OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK AND REPEALING VARIOUS SECTIONS AS SUPERSEDED BY THE 2022 CITY CHARTER; AMENDING THE NOTICE REQUIREMENTS FOR ELECTIONS; REPEALING CERTAIN SECTIONS WHOSE DUTIES ARE CONDUCTED BY THE OKEECHOBEE SUPERVISOR OF ELECTIONS OR CANVASSING BOARD; AMENDING THE PROCEDURES FOR ACCEPTING THE CANVASSING BOARD RETURNS OF ALL ELECTIONS AND ISSUING CERTIFICATES OF ELECTION; PROVIDING FOR CODIFICATION; PROVIDING FOR CONFLICT; PROVIDING FOR SEVERABILITY; PROVIDING FOR AN EFFECTIVE DATE.”**

Motion by Council Member Chandler, seconded by Council Member Jarriel to approve the second reading and adopt proposed Ordinance No. 1327.

At the First Reading held on March 3, 2026, proposed Ordinance No. 1327 was amended by changing the qualifying period for the General City Elections from the second week of June back to the third week of August. In the cover memorandum within Exhibit 4, City Clerk Gamiotea asked the City Council to reconsider the amendment. Since the majority did not want to move that period to June, she asked them to consider changing it to the first week in August. The memorandum provided multiple reasons for the change, the history of qualifying week and its date changes over the years, and her method of initially recommending the change to June. Additionally, she added, when the County’s Primary Election falls on the same week as the City’s qualifying period, it prevents her from being able to attend and participate in the Canvassing Board’s activities during that timeframe.

Council Member McAuley made a motion to amend the motion on the floor, to approve the second reading and adopt proposed Ordinance No. 1327, to include changing qualifying week to the first full week of August [or more specifically from noon on the 92nd day prior to the November General Election but no later than noon on the 96th day prior to the November General Election]; seconded by Council Member Chandler. City Clerk Gamiotea distributed copies of proposed amended Ordinance No. 1327 with the language highlighted that would be required to be changed with this amendment (a copy has been added to Exhibit 4, of the official Minute File). It included adding verbiage to the Ordinance Title, second Whereas, and Section 26-3. Additionally, she noted that within the amended version distributed there were also several non-significant typographical errors corrected, they are in Sections 2 through 14, Part I reads Part II, added “amended” to the Introduced paragraph on page five, added “reading” to the Passed paragraph on page five, should this amendment pass, “and amended at the” will also be added to that sentence. **Motion to Amend Carried Three to Two, with Vice Mayor Clark and Council Member Jarriel Voting No.**

Because the Ordinance Title was amended, and a case could possibly be made that the amendment was of some significance, the City Attorney recommended the final vote be postponed to a date certain. This would allow for the final vote on the adoption of the proposed twice amended Ordinance, to take place on a separate date. A legal publication will not be required. However, the City Clerk’s Office will post the amendment content and postponed Public Hearing on the City’s website, public Bulletin Board, and Social Media platform. **Motion by Vice Mayor Clark, seconded by Council Member McAuley to postpone the adoption of proposed Ordinance No. 1327 as amended to a date certain, April 21, 2026. Motion Carried Unanimously to Postpone the Motion as Amended.**

MAYOR WATFORD CLOSED THE PUBLIC HEARING AT 6:21 P.M.

VII. NEW BUSINESS

A. Motion by Vice Mayor Clark, seconded by Council Member Jarriel to approve the [Fiscal Year (FY)] 2025-26 Mid-Year Budget Amendments [as presented in **Exhibit 5** and listed below, yellow highlighted amounts denote changes]:

Fund Summary	FY 2025-26 Budget as Adopted 9/22/2025	Proposed FY 2025-26 Mid-Year Budget Amendments
General Fund:		
FY Beginning Balance	\$ 4,342,502.00	\$ 4,342,502.00
Total Revenues	<u>\$ 8,388,220.00</u>	<u>\$ 8,440,720.00</u>
Transfers-In from Public Facilities Improvement Fund	\$ 350,000.00	\$ 350,000.00
Transfers-In from Capital Improvement Projects Fund	\$ 0.00	\$ 41,558.00
Total Expenditures	<u>\$ 8,738,194.00</u>	<u>\$ 8,832,278.00</u>
FYE Balance	\$ 4,342,528.00	\$ 4,342,502.00

VII. NEW BUSINESS CONTINUED

A. Continued. Explanation of Amendments to the General Fund Budget (page numbers of the Budget Book in Exhibit 5 are noted): Revenues increased a total of \$94,058.00. Specifically, line item 001-322-0000 Building and Inspection Fees +\$47,500.00 (page 2), line item 001-369-4000 Code Enforcement Fines +\$5,000.00 (page 3), and Transfers-In from the Capital Improvement Projects Fund \$+41,558.00 (pages 1 and 24). Expenditures increased a total of \$94,084.00, to cover unexpected and actual costs of expected retirement pay outs, temporary employment for Patty Burnette, increases to the General Services Director and Information Technician salaries, moved the Public Works Director salary from regular to executive salaries as the Director position was re-implemented, added a 20-year Longevity Award, unemployment compensation claims, and increased fuel costs. Specific Departments line items changes were:

Administration, 001-512-1100 Executive Salaries +\$9,900.00 (page 6), 001-512-5201 Fuel and Oil +\$340.00 (page 7).

Finance, 001-513-1100 Executive Salaries +\$14,900.00, and 001-513-2200 Retirement +\$1,550.00 (page 13).

General Services, 001-519-1100 Executive Salaries +\$17,528.00, 001-519-1300 Other Salary +\$900.00, 001-519-2100 FICA +\$70.00 (page 15), and 001-519-5203 Surcharges Remitted for Permits +\$8,000.00 (page 16).

Police, 001-521-1200 Regular Salaries +\$8,800.00, 001-521-1520 Officers Longevity/Service +\$2,100.00, 001-521-2100 FICA +\$673.00, 001-521-2200 Retirement +\$25.00, 001-521-2500 Unemployment Compensation +\$3,500.00 (page 17), and 001-521-5201 Fuel and Oil +\$16,020.00 (page 18).

Public Safety, 001-529-4609 Repair and Maintenance Building and Equipment +\$4,460.00 (page 20).

Public Works, 001-541-1100 Executive Salaries +\$66,300.00, 001-541-1200 Regular Salaries - \$79,048.00, 001-541-2100 FICA -\$6,040.00, 001-541-2200 Retirement -\$1,864.00, 001-541-2500 Unemployment Compensation +\$4,500.00 (page 21), 001-541-4605 Repair and Maintenance Parks +\$9,400.00, and 001-541-5201 Fuel and Oil, +\$11,890.00 (page 22).

Fund Summary	FY 2025-26 Budget as Adopted 9/22/2025	Proposed FY 2025-26 Mid-Year Budget Amendments
Public Facilities Improvement Fund:		
FY Beginning Balance	\$ 537,452.00	No Amendments
Total Revenues	<u>\$ 794,730.00</u>	Presented
Total Expenditures	<u>\$ 912,200.00</u>	
Transfers-Out to General Fund	<u>\$ 350,000.00</u>	
FYE Balance	\$ 69,982.00	
Capital Improvement Projects Fund:		
FY Beginning Balance	\$ 3,981,612.00	\$ 3,981,612.00
Total Revenues	<u>\$ 0.00</u>	<u>\$ 0.00</u>
Total Expenditures	<u>\$ 1,883,750.00</u>	<u>\$ 1,922,250.00</u>
Transfers-Out to General Fund	<u>\$ 0.00</u>	<u>\$ 41,558.00</u>
FYE Balance	\$ 2,097,862.00	\$ 2,017,804.00

Explanation of Amendments to the Capital Improvement Projects Fund Budget: 304-519-6400 General Services Capital +\$47,900.00 for worked added to the HVAC Services Project No. PW 02-00-09-25, and 304-549-6401 Parks Capital Improvement -\$9,400.00 for Christmas Displays (pages 24 and 25).

Industrial Development Grant Fund:		
FY Beginning Balance	\$ 0.00	\$ 0.00
Total Revenues	<u>\$ 0.00</u>	<u>\$ 21,508.00</u>
Total Expenditures	<u>\$ 0.00</u>	<u>\$ 21,508.00</u>
FYE Balance	\$ 0.00	\$ 0.00

Explanation of Amendments to the Industrial Development Grant Fund Budget: 305-332-1000 American Rescue Plan Act Funds +\$21,508.00 (the last of these funds) and 305-538-6300 Stormwater Infrastructure +\$21,808.00, towards the SE 8th AVE Phase II Stormwater Improvement Project (page 26).

Appropriations Grant Fund:		
FY Beginning Balance	\$ 0.00	\$ 0.00
Total Revenues	<u>\$ 0.00</u>	<u>\$ 1,200,000.00</u>
Total Expenditures	<u>\$ 0.00</u>	<u>\$ 1,200,000.00</u>
FYE Balance	\$ 0.00	\$ 0.00

Explanation of Amendments to the Appropriations Grant Fund Budget: 307-334-4000 Appropriation Funds +\$1,200,000.00 [awarded from the State Department of Commerce Agreement No. D0339] for Roadway Improvements in the City's Commerce Center [and possibly the Park Street Commerce Center], and 307-559-6300 Street Improvements/Additions +\$1,200,000.00 (page 27).

VII. NEW BUSINESS CONTINUED

A. Continued.

Fund Summary	FY 2025-26 Budget as Adopted 9/22/2025	Proposed FY 2025-26 Mid-Year Budget Amendments
Other Capital Grant Fund:		
FY Beginning Balance	\$ 1,015,000.00	No Amendments
Total Revenues	\$ 1,039,000.00	Presented
Total Expenditures	<u>\$ 1,015,000.00</u>	
FYE Balance	\$ 0.00	
Law Enforcement Special Fund:		
FY Beginning Balance	\$ 12,900.00	No Amendments
Total Revenues	<u>\$ 1,000.00</u>	Presented
Total Expenditures	<u>\$ 5,000.00</u>	
FYE Balance	\$ 8,900.00	

Motion Carried Unanimously.

- B. Motion by Vice Mayor Clark, seconded by Council Member Jarriel to approve the Second Amendment to the Interlocal Agreement [with] Okeechobee County for Fire Services [original executed on December 1, 2020, First Amendment executed on May 18, 2021, as presented in **Exhibit 6**]. **Motion Carried Four to One, Mayor Watford Voting No.**

VIII. CITY ATTORNEY UPDATE

A copy of the update was added to the official Minute File, labeled as **Exhibit 9**.

- Finalized the Fire Services Interlocal which was on tonight's agenda.
- Finalized and sent out the letter of reduction for the Mallard Landing Performance Bond.
- Forwarded the City's version of the Impact Fee Interlocal Agreement to the County Attorney for review.
- Working on the implementation of Online Public Notices and in contact with the County to review their procedures.
- Continuing to review and research possible amendments to the Code of Ordinances Business Tax Receipt (BTR) sections to clarify Code Enforcement staff's procedures for delinquent annual BTR renewals and how to litigate them.

IX. CITY ADMINISTRATOR UPDATE

- The next step of the City Hall Resiliency Hardening Improvements Project is the installation of new doors and soffits. The windows have been ordered.
- The Proctor Construction Company's estimate for the Public Safety Building remodel is in progress. One of the changes being included is a covered walkway between City Hall and the Public Safety Building which will match the architecture of both buildings. The Contract will be presented soon.
- Commended Finance Director Connell and General Services Director Parker for the great jobs they have done since joining the City staff.
- The proposed revisions and amendments to the Land Development Regulations are continuing to be worked on by Planner Smith and will be brought back for the City Council to review.
- Met with Mr. Baughman of B&B Site Development and the contractor for Park Street Commerce Center regarding the installation holdup of wastewater and water lines across RaceTrac property to the new Culver's restaurant. Park Street Commerce Center must transfer the easement to the Okeechobee Utility Authority before they accept the lines. The opening date for Culver's is now estimated for July 2026.
- Advised that the City received approval from the State of Florida Department of Commerce to allocate the excess funds from Grant Agreement No. D0339 to the Phase I Roadway Work in the Park Street Commerce Center Subdivision.

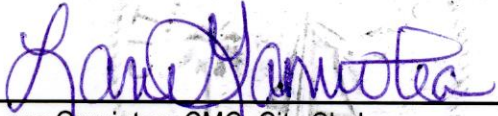
X. COUNCIL COMMENTS

- Council Member Chandler advised he was attending a meeting in Administrator Ritter's office regarding potential changes in Veterans Memorial Square (which will be brought to the City Council at a future regular meeting) when Mayor Watford arrived with a group of North Elementary School 4th Graders on a field trip for their History Class. He stated Mayor Watford does an amazing job teaching the community's younger generation and that he is proud to call him Mayor.
- Council Member Jarriel stated Proctor is doing a good job with the City Hall Resiliency Hardening Project.
- Council Member McAuley noted he advised Lieutenant Reyna of the landscape buffer around Walmart being in poor condition after the freeze. Code Enforcement staff did a great job ensuring Walmart cleaned them up.
- Mayor Watford added his kudos to the City's Public Works Director for his swiftness in getting the traffic arrows on Northwest 5th AVE at the intersection of North Park Street repainted correctly by FL Department of Transportation on Good Friday.

XI. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further items, Mayor Watford adjourned the meeting at 6:54 P.M.

Submitted By:



Lane Gamiotea, CMC, City Clerk

Please take notice and be advised that when a person decides to appeal any decision made by the City Council with respect to any matter considered at this meeting, s/he may need to ensure that a verbatim record of the proceeding is made, which record includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based. City Clerk media are for the sole purpose of backup for official records of the Clerk.